

Poverty, Prosperity & the Programmatic Agreement

Remarks before the Guam Chamber of Commerce

By Eddie Baza Calvo

Good afternoon, friends and fellow Guamanians. First, I want to say that Ray and I are very grateful for the encouragement you've given us these past three weeks in office. We made some tough decisions, and you stood beside us. Whenever I come before the Chamber of Commerce, I feel at home. I was the chairman of this body right before I became a senator. I was an executive back then... and I'm proud to say, I'm an executive again. The difference is, the organization I run now is much larger. There are many more customers, and a whole lot of challenges. And I don't answer to stockholders or a board of directors. I answer directly to the people of Guam.

I've been doing a lot of listening since Ray and I came to office. We set out to fix our problems and to help the most vulnerable among us. In these dynamic times, it's so important that no one is left behind.

When we talk about the most vulnerable, sometimes I feel people are shouting at each other, while saying the same thing.

I know many of you personally in this room. I've seen your heartaches when you couldn't hire a high school graduate because he couldn't read the application he was trying to fill out. I've heard your frustrations at the waste in government while children with disabilities go unserved. You never let any of us forget about the families waiting for their tax refunds... or the employees affected when the government doesn't pay its vendor bills.

People are struggling across this island. Poverty is on the rise. There aren't enough jobs. Prices are rising. Homelessness is growing.

This government does not currently have the resources to address all these problems. We all know that. Collectively, we know that the answer is just staring us in the face. The military buildup is our big opportunity. Yet, can't look at it as the 'be all, end all' solution to our problems. It is the impetus for our success. We have to be good leaders, and focused visionaries. We have to take advantage of the pending economic conditions, and plan for our future. Most importantly, everything we do must be in the best long-term interest of the people.

The biggest challenge before us, though, is ensuring we don't leave people behind. Those living in poverty... those looking for a job... those dreaming of a home... they must reap the rewards of an economic upturn.

So, while there may be very different opinions about how this military buildup should proceed, it's very clear to me that we're talking about the same thing. None of us should be too quick to dismiss what critics are saying. If you listen very closely to Speaker Won Pat, or We Are Guahan, or to Senator Guthertz, they want to make sure that the most vulnerable among us have a voice. They want to see Guamanians prosper, buildup or not. They want to see our culture thrive. They want to lift people from poverty... and give all an opportunity.

Everyone in this room is saying the same thing as the critics. We all share this Guamanian Dream of prosperity for all our people. The goals are the same. And, I have to tell you, underneath all the vocal

and, sometimes, emotional discourse is the same message about how we should approach this buildup.

Following the Navy's concessions on Pagat village and land return, there was a barrage of messages about how we should proceed with the Programmatic Agreement. The funny thing is, everyone was saying the same thing: "Get it in writing."

That's exactly what we're doing. We've asked for the Navy to include their concessions in the Programmatic Agreement or in a separate parallel agreement. We want surety that Pagat village won't be affected by the firing range. We want their commitment in writing to the investments they will make to our infrastructure. Most of all, we want it in writing that land will be returned... and that the federal footprint will shrink.

If you listen closely to the activists, they're singing the same tune, especially about land. The return of land can open up so many opportunities for people living in poverty. We can build affordable housing. We can restart the Ancestral and Chamorro Land Trust process. We can open new public schools so that the next generation can have the wherewithal to lead a robust economy.

The Programmatic Agreement is far from finished. If we can get the Navy's four promises in writing, then I will support the signing of the agreement. With the shrinking of the federal footprint and Pagat village off the table, the Navy is presenting reasonable resolution.

And to be clear, I want to see the military buildup happen. I will not ask the Marines to turn around and find another home. I will not turn away \$15 billion from this island as people are struggling just to get by. I will not be a governor who errs on the side of political caution while the future prosperity of all Guamanians is in jeopardy.

This can work for us all. We can co-exist. In a few years, I want to be the first person to walk out on to the tarmac, greet the first Marines to arrive, and tell them 'Hafa Adai, my fellow Guamanians.'

Thank you and have a great week.